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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CUBA; SAO PAULO

"Cubans Awaiting The End Of Fidel's Era"

Center-right O Estado de S. Paulo's reporter Luiz Zanin Oricchio reports from Havana (12/22): "Cubans are awaiting with apparent serenity the transition that will follow the end of Fidel Castro's era. There is a clear farewell climate in the air. Even the official tone of the newspapers seems to be exaggerated.... The cult of personality extends to the television with an overdose of video-clips on the revolution and debates on the historical importance of the leader.... It is the reaffirmation process of an already built image, aimed at reinforcing social cohesion for a transition that the regime intends to carry out without any risk.... There is no credible news on Fidel's health.... The media prepares a farewell and at the same time reaffirms that he continues alive and alert.... No one believes that Fidel will reassume the post completely. People believe that he may survive, but this is all. Transition is inescapable and everyone is aware of that. There is a general sensation of farewell involving the nation.... There are those who believe that the transition will be quick and radical, as the Cuban exile community in Miami wishes. But there are also those who think that it will be slow and gradual, but inexorable towards capitalism and democracy. And there are some who believe that the transition is already taking place, as is the case of British historian Richard Gott, who says in his recent book that while superficial conservatives believe that Cuba is a gerontocracy, the decision making power has actually been transferred to talented young politicians such as Carlos Lage Dvila, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Ministerial Council, and Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, president of the National Assembly. Raul Castro heads the Army and Fidel is now a sick and aged chief of state who symbolizes the revolutionary achievements. When he dies, everything will allow an already outlined course."

Wolfe